

Oakland University  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Department of English  
ENG 3650 (CRN 41145) / REL 3740 (CRN 12560)  
Fall 2018

Prof. Doris Plantus  
530 O'Dowd  
Class Room: 318 PH

Class Time: M/W/F 10:40-11:47

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STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS/THEOLOGICAL CONTENT, THEMES, AND DISCUSSION

This is a course in the study of the Bible as literature. It is not a course in religion and/or theology. In order to approach the study of the Bible as a central document to Western Civilization, it is necessary to explore the religious practices and beliefs of people and their respective societies at given points in time, without making the objective a study in Judaism or Christianity. This requires that we treat the Bible as a literary document within a historical setting, without yielding to proselytizing or criticism of individual beliefs. Therefore, the instructor reserves the right to moderate discussions should they deviate from a literary-historical approach. Objective: read the biblical text as a literary piece, and not as a theological tract which must be defended for religious truth, or exposed as fraud. Outcome: Identify literary components of the text, including, but not limited to, narrative style, genre, devices such as metaphor, personification, hyperbole, anthropomorphism, triadic line, envelope structure, dramatic irony, pericope, parable, archetype, protagonist, theme, and resumptive repetition.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Bible as Literature naturally invites an approach of study that emphasizes the artistic, imaginative, technical, linguistic, philosophical, and historical aspects of this formidable anthology. Students will focus on literary forms, such as epic, poetry, epistle, and short story, as well as literary elements such as plot, character, theme, symbolism and so on. Patterns of narrative, such as type scenes, along with other devices particularly unique to biblical literature (resumptive repetition, chiasmic structure), will also be noted. At all times, we will acknowledge the importance of language, both in its original and multiple, translated versions, where appropriate. Students will read the weekly lectures and supplemental material that frame the assignments, and then study the biblical texts using literary methods available. The course is textually driven, meaning that we will do a great deal of reading biblical narratives.

This course satisfies the University General Education requirement for the Literature Knowledge Area.

This course is also designed for both English Majors and Religious Studies students seeking to improve their understanding of the Bible as a constructed literary document.

Course Prerequisite: Junior Standing; RHT 160

#### GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Knowledge of how literature is an expression of culture.*

We will fulfill this objective by attending carefully to the details of the text. We will address social and religious forces that influenced the notion that these “sacred” texts were not fiction, but rather divinely inspired, and purposeful expressions of the Truth. We will not debate the authority of scripture as a challenge to our own individual beliefs, but rather secularize the Bible in order to read it as literature. Students’ careful observations and reflections will be assisted by the instructor, who will provide information relating to the historical and social contexts of the works. Our discussions, though, will always begin with the text itself and the students’ responses to the text.

*Knowledge of literary form.*

We will consider the form of each book we read and the assumptions/conventions that seem to govern that form. We are all highly familiar with different genres (situation comedy versus hourlong drama series, illustrated books versus graphic novels, poetry versus science fiction); students will be encouraged to become more attentive to the conventions of less culturally familiar genres (e.g., hymn, prophetic book, epistle, epic). The role of pericope, type scenes, and mythology will be considered as extensions of oral tradition. We will also carefully examine how the particular words of the text affect the reader, all the more as these forms include translation.

#### Specific Course Objectives

Knowledge of philology to discern and appreciate meaning at level of sentence and word  
How to apply literature and its interdisciplinary parts to the enhancement of any and every major  
How to apply this course, its content, and discussion to the real world, making this course particular to life outside of college as it is general to college education  
How to develop intuition for problem solving through the exploration of literature

#### GENERAL EDUCATION CROSS CUTTING CAPACITY: CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is both a fabulous skill that requires constant cultivation, and a snappy buzz word in academics. This course expressly engages critical thinking because it is imperative for creating and sustaining knowledge, over mere memorization. Critical thinking requires **intellectual discipline**: in terms of this course, this means training how to reject common, predetermined reflexes to biblical material—namely, injecting religious dogma or seeking to challenge it in the various narratives by repeating sounds bytes gleaned from late-night talk show hosts or comedians who pass for scholars of religious history. The very premise of the course—Bible as Literature—

demands that we find a different way of looking at material that is intricately bound up with theology and, to a certain degree, politics, in order to separate its intrinsic components. That is, because language is the primary platform, we must be attentive to the ways language is used to inform, manipulate, educate, evaluate, both the concrete and the abstract. Instead of reacting to linguistic triggers, we take our time and decide the functions of parts of speech: who is talking and to whom? What are they saying? *How* are they saying it? What do they intend, and what does it *really* mean. What kind of question should we pose? What kind of question can be answered? All of these speak to mental processes that can be—and should be—activated for every subject.

*This course is ADA compliant and Observes FERPA regulations.*

*Content complies with Fair Use Act, or Permission.*

*Online content and design is peer reviewed for continuous refinement and improvement.*

*The Instructor of Record has completed the Quality Online Teaching Certification Course.*

### COURSE OUTCOMES

- ~Students will be able to identify and isolate the literary aspects and elements of the Bible.
- ~Students will understand the function of literary styles and devices in biblical narratives.
- ~Students will have necessary critical thinking skills as a means of understanding textual meaning at the level of word, word phrase, sentence, and passage.
- ~Students will have an acute appreciation of the original biblical text and context, contrasted by previous or current impressions from media, pop culture, theological interpretation, family tradition, other courses, etc.
- ~Students will appreciate the role of language and translation in literature in general, and the Bible in particular.
- ~Students will identify biblical archetypes, ancient plotlines, and early literary techniques that have fundamentally shaped and inspired Western Civilization, as well as Eastern cultures in terms of ethics, philosophy, literature, art, music, dance, and traditions, to name a few.
- ~Students will grasp a sundry of other useful tools for conveying meaning, such as symbolism and metaphor, in discussions of biblical literature.
- ~Students will acquire aesthetic training in reading the Bible for its relentless value as an ancient text composed by a specific people at a specific time, for a specific purpose, which provides illumination into the mysteries of the human condition.

### SPECIFIC COURSE OBJECTIVES

The Bible is largely predicated upon the idea of **Logos** and the very identity of language as a critical medium through which human experience is captured, interpreted, and established at the very nucleus of consciousness and interaction. One of the goals of this course is to acknowledge the artistic and meaningful process by which the canon (and apocrypha), made the transition from oral tradition to written form and, in the case of New Testament documents, such as Luke's Gospel and Paul's letters, the self-conscious process of writing compositions with an intended audience, using concurrent stylistic conventions. Students will refine an appreciation of the text and the

methodology necessary to analyze and interpret biblical material. To the same extent that students are taught to read Shakespeare and reflect on form, content, style, metaphor, punning, and allusion, for example, students will interact with the biblical text, similarly confronting literary structure, genre, ambiguity, discovery, allegory, and meaning. We will note the constant impact of translation upon the text, and stay as close to the original Hebrew and Greek as possible, in order to experience the Bible as it was originally intended.

We will also become a bit more familiar with the Bible as a central document in Western culture, while having a brief look at Eastern culture as well. Taken together, these objectives will guide students to read the Bible in an informed and sophisticated way. Finally, when students have completed the course, they will have gained valuable knowledge that can be critically applied in an interdisciplinary way, not only in their academic and professional undertakings, but to their personal enjoyment.

#### ACADEMIC CONDUCT POLICY

**Cheating on examinations, plagiarism, falsifying reports/records, and unauthorized collaboration, access, or modifying of computer programs are considered serious breaches of academic conduct that may lead to expulsion. Suspect cases are referred to the Office of the Dean of Students. The Oakland University policy on academic conduct will be strictly followed with no exceptions. See catalog under Academic Policies and Procedures.**

ADDS/DROPS: The University add/drop policy will be explicitly followed. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of University deadline dates for dropping the course.

IMPORTANT DATES: Please follow this link: [http://www.oakland.edu/important\\_dates](http://www.oakland.edu/important_dates)

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS** Students with disabilities who may require special considerations should make an appointment with the campus Disability Support Services. Students should also bring their needs to the attention of the instructor as soon as possible. Generally, this means the instructor will grant additional time for quizzes.

#### TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE:

Students should be proficient in basic computer skills, including Word processing programs, Power Point, downloading and uploading documents. Students should also be familiar with Moodle, and if there are technical questions regarding navigating an online course, they should be directed to the Help Desk (248) 370.805.1626. Students must also have reliable internet access on a daily basis.

In the event of power outages, or other technical issues with computers that might prevent online participation during a WebEx, or Discussion Boards, students should have an alternate plan to allow for uninterrupted interaction with the online format.

Online courses, particularly on subjects that have a great deal of interest or controversy, carry an extra danger for plagiarism. Students frequently supplement their own readings (or compensate for the lack thereof), by surfing the net. Since a requirement for this course is Rhetoric/Composition, which teaches students to properly cite materials, there can be no defense for replicating someone else's ideas or work, without proper attribution. **DO NOT USE INTERNET MATERIAL IN YOUR POSTS OR PAPERS UNLESS YOU PROPERLY CITE THE AUTHOR AND SOURCE.**

**ATTENDANCE:** Faithful, punctual attendance is crucial since we will be aggressive in our coverage of the texts. For online students, weekly activity is required, but should not be limited to one or two logins per week. Students who presume to check into Moodle once or twice a week only do not perform well. Treat the logins as actual attendance in a class, where you should spend time reading posts, commenting, contributing material to the vocabulary list, or Wiki page. This means at least 3 times a week for discussion boards, supplemental material, or for specific news announcements.

#### **CLASS FORMAT**

Lively, meaningful, and thoughtful discussion is paramount to this class. I will provide background material in terms of historical and literary-historical contexts for the readings, but the analysis of all passages must be cultivated and sustained by the class. Students are expected to read all assignments carefully and be prepared to answer questions, many towards oral points that factor into the 20% category of attendance and participation. Because the reading list is aggressive, it is imperative that everyone make time to read selections with attention. Worth mentioning is the interdisciplinary approach we will include in our study of literature. This means that we will explore ideas across other disciplines and find segues, connections, relevance, wonder, intrigue, and sometimes, truth. Do not conclude that discussions are "off topic" because they are interdisciplinary.

**CLASSROOM CONDUCT:** Courtesy and respect, which should not have to be required, but freely given, must be the standard. Let us treat one another, therefore, accordingly. The class relies upon and encourages robust discussion in the spirit of intellectual honesty and creating knowledge. Differing points of view are welcomed, however, political, racial, cultural, or philosophical intolerance is not. No bashing or bullying, though let us not abuse these terms either. Good behavior is expected. On the other hand, we can all learn to fend for ourselves in discussion without emotional outburst, dramatic protestations, and juvenile behavior. We communicate with words, after all, not sticks and stones.

**CELL PHONES, LAPTOPS, ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** Past experience proves that texting, paging, surfing the net, etc. is not only disruptive to class, but counter-productive to learning even in online environments. All cell phones, pagers should to be put on vibrate when you are logged in. Unless you are a firefighter, or have a loved one in the hospital, or have a parent/grandparent at risk, or have children, there is no good reason to constantly monitor your texts or emails, or keep the facebook tab open while you are logged in to class. For online students, this means time spent in the Moodle environment should not be compromised with other tasks, such as eating, or watching

tv, or texting, or face-booking. Of course, this is not an enforceable suggestion, but you will be less likely to spill your drinks and retain more if you limit your distractions.

### ONLINE QUIZZES

We will discuss the utility of writing quizzes through Moodle as an option for allowing more time for class discussion. Weekly quizzes will help reinforce the material. Generally these are a multiple choice or true/false, and in many cases draw directly from the lecture material and readings. But do not be misled into thinking they are simple memorization challenges. The quizzes are meant to strengthen the student's grasp of material (and make sure the material is being read), therefore, the questions require critical thinking. Take each one, and strive to do your best. We will see how the quizzes tally up before deciding if lowest quiz may be dropped. This almost never happens. Quizzes are timed and have open/close dates. Since the readings may not necessarily fall neatly into equal parts, you can expect quizzes to emerge as close to the assigned readings as possible, generally opening over the weekend. I will do my best to accommodate everyone.

### EXAMS

Exams are likely multiple choice, and draw from quizzes, discussion boards, readings, and lecture material. Emphasis will be placed on comprehension of materials; exams test for outcomes. This means the questions are not drawn from memorization, but require some critical thinking to complement the method we trained with. The best exercise for this is the discussion board. Questions may include critical passages about literary technique, analysis of structure, plot, or allegory, for example. All questions presume access to the text; therefore, questions will always exceed mere memorization.

Helpful links: <http://www.bib-arch.org/>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/>

<http://www.bookreviews.org/>

<http://www.ntgateway.com/>

<http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/Library/library.html>

<http://www.biblestudy.org/maps/main.html>

[http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/05\\_2/troyer\\_names\\_of\\_god.htm#bild01](http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/05_2/troyer_names_of_god.htm#bild01)

<http://www.bible-history.com/maps/> <http://carta-jerusalem.com/>

<http://bible.ort.org/books/torahd5.asp>

<http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/aristeas.htm> [Letter of Aristeas that points to the Seventy elders who translated the Pentateuch into koine]

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/diatessaron.html> [includes the oldest harmonization of the Gospels by Tatian]

## GRADES

Attendance and Participation	20%
Quizzes	10%
Midterm	25%
Final	25%
2 Short Papers (5% each)	10%
Weekly Vocabulary/Terms	10%

All papers must conform to MLA guidelines, and must be word processed and submitted on time. Since this course is a writing intensive course, the assumption is that all students are familiar with collegiate-level essay writing. If you are not familiar with MLA style and format, please do not wait until papers are imminent. Consult with the Writing Center early so that your papers meet the requirements. Always submit Word documents, and not Mac docs.

The instructor reserves the right to make modifications to the syllabus, if and when needed. Students must sign the syllabus as evidence that they understand the course and reading requirements. We will do this by uploading a statement to Moodle that says you have read, understood, and agreed to the requirements of the course.

All papers and exams must be completed in order to get credit for the course.

I realize how heavy the demands are for this course, but I can assure you that everyone who takes it finds it to be one of the most rewarding courses.

## ABOUT ME:

I am a very passionate and energetic professor who relies on critical thinking and interdisciplinary method in the way I teach. I also have refreshingly high standards for my students and strive relentlessly to inspire and motivate them to reach those standards. Because I am dedicated to the highest caliber of instruction, I will give my full measure to conveying ideas and concepts, using examples from history, pop culture, philosophy, mechanics, music, art, cooking, or agriculture, for example. I also depend on lots and lots of humor. My background is very diverse, so I am able to provide a rich array of analogies or materials that work to analyze and appreciate the literature. One need not like a subject in order to benefit from it☺. My particular interests include language and translation, biblical Greek and Hebrew, ancient texts of every kind, music, art, astronomy, archaeology, philosophy, mechanics, history, and problem solving. **The greatest thing I can do for you is teach you *how* to think, and not *what* to think.** In exchange for your time and attention, I will teach you how biblical literature can enrich your life, inspire and delight your mind, make you a critical thinker, and cultivate the kind of aesthetic so important to the human condition. Of course, my style is not for everyone, but I do expect your respectful attention in class to me, as well as to your class mates.

General Schedule: Readings are subject to change.

Reading Schedule: The date indicates the week on which the readings should start for that time frame.

September

Week 1 (Readings are to be done in the week in which they appear)

09/05 Intro to course; Intro to Pentateuch;  
Lectures 1-5;  
Genesis: 1-50  
Exodus: 1-20, 24-28, 30-34  
Leviticus: 26

Week 2

09/10 Discussion; Genesis,, Exodus, Leviticus  
Lectures 6-8  
Numbers: 6:1-8; 11-14; 17; 20-24; 27:12-23; 33  
Deuteronomy: 5-11; 31-34

Week 3

09/17 Discussion; Numbers, Deuteronomy  
Lectures 11-12  
Joshua: 1-8; 10; 23-24  
Judges: 3-5; 11; 13-16  
I Samuel: 1-31  
II Samuel: 1-4; 6; 9-16;18; 21-24  
I Kings: 1-3; 5-6; 16-19  
II Kings: 2-4

Week 4

09/24 Discussion; Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings  
Lectures: 9-10  
Isaiah 1; 5-7; 9-11; 14; 40; 42-44; 55; 61; 65-66  
Jeremiah:1; 4-8; 13; 18-20; 23; 31; 36  
Ezekiel: 1-4; 17; 37  
First short paper due

Week 5

10/01 Discussion; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, 12 Minor Prophets  
Lectures: 13-14  
Psalms 8; 22-23;74; 121; 127; 137  
Proverbs: 1, 8-10, 19, 20, 22  
Ecclesiastes: 1-4, 7-9  
Job: 1-3; 38-42

Week 6

10/08 Discussion; Prophets, Ecclesiastes, Job



	Ruth: 1-4; Daniel: 1-12
Week 7	
10/15	Discussion; Ruth, Daniel Song of Songs; Review MIDTERM
Week 8	
10/22	Intro to New Testament Lectures: 15-18 Matthew Mark
Week 9	
10/29	Discussion; Matthew, Mark Lectures: 19-20 Luke, John Second short paper due
Week 10	
11/05	Discussion; Luke, John Lecture: 21 Acts
Week 11	
11/12	Discussion; Acts Lecture 22 Paul: TBA
Week 12	
11/19	Discussion; Paul Lectures: 23-24 Revelation
THANKSGIVING RECESS 11/21 @ 10:00pm	
Week 13	
11/26	Discussion; Revelation Review
Week 14	
12/03	Review
Final Exam	
12/13; 12-3:00PM	